

# **“Celtic” or “Catholic”? Writing the history of Scottish Christianity, AD 664–1093**

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This paper represents an attempt to rethink how we approach the writing of the history of Christianity in Scotland during the later part of the early middle ages, by focusing on some historiographical prejudices and perspectives, and trying to dislodge them. It is not, however, an attempt to replace one kind of prejudice with another, though I am conscious that some readers may leap to that conclusion, or even come to it after consideration. Rather it seeks to achieve a situation in which we take the Christian culture of early medieval Scotland both on the evidence and in its early medieval context, instead of importing, often unknowingly, anachronistic religious and political controversies.

There are two main conceptual roadblocks for any historian trying to write about this period, both of which are also applicable to the conversion period leading up to 664. One, on which I have written in various venues, has to do with the past and to some extent continuing tendency of Scottish church historians to make hagiography the cornerstone of church narrative, and saints the main protagonists of the story of the evolving Scottish church.<sup>1</sup> I shall not be directly addressing that issue in this paper, but by not dealing to any great extent with saints or hagiography (for there is very little hagiography from the main part of this period in any case), I hope to hint at

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<sup>1</sup> For the most intelligent and cautious of such attempts, see A. Macquarrie, *The Saints of Scotland: Essays in Scottish Church History AD 450–1093* (Edinburgh, 1997); for some explorations of the problems, see T.O. Clancy, Review of Thomas Heffernan, *Sacred Biography: Saints and their Biographers in the Middle Ages*, in *Innes Review*, 46 (1995), 165-8; “The real St Ninian”, *Innes Review*, 52 (2001), 1-28, esp. 1; “Scottish saints and national identities in the early middle ages”, in *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West*, edd. A. Thacker and R. Sharpe (Oxford, 2002), 397-422.

an approach to Scotland's Christian history that does not rely on hagiography to tell its story.

The second roadblock is the concept of the Celtic Church, about which there has been much passionate writing in recent years.<sup>2</sup> I am in the highly sceptical camp when it comes to the existence of such an entity as the "Celtic Church", or even "Celtic Christianity", yet it remains a persistent feature the historiography. Even authors who distrust the term are unwilling entirely to shed it from their titles.<sup>3</sup> It has assumed such a large and often tacit place in how we read the past that it cannot simply be ignored, it must be exorcised, and that is part of my purpose in this paper.<sup>4</sup>

Historiographically, as has long been recognised, the Celtic Church is a product of the Protestant Reformation. It had its literary apotheosis as a

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<sup>2</sup> The most comprehensive recent reviews are D.E. Meek, *The Quest for Celtic Christianity* (Boat of Garten, 2000) and Ian Bradley, *Celtic Christianity: Making Myths and Chasing Dreams* (Edinburgh, 1999). The classic critiques of the idea of the "Celtic Church" are K. Hughes, "The Celtic Church: is this a valid concept?", *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 1 (1981), 1-20 and W. Davies "The myth of the Celtic Church" in *The Early Church in Wales and the West* (Oxford, 1992), 12-21; I have not yet had a chance to assess the defence mounted in M.W. Herren and S.A. Brown, *Christ in Celtic Christianity: Britain and Ireland from the Fifth to the Tenth Century* (Woodbridge, 2002), esp. 104-36. For negative critiques of "Celtic Christianity", see G. Márkus, "The end of Celtic Christianity", *Epworth Review*, 24.3 (July 1997), 45-55; Meek, *Quest*. Some cautious defences of aspects of the concept by J. Wooding, O. Davies and M. Low may be found in *Celts and Christians: New Approaches to the Religious Traditions of Britain and Ireland*, ed. M. Atherton (Cardiff, 2002). On both issues, see the authoritative but accommodating discussion of Thomas O'Loughlin, *Celtic Theology: Humanity, World and God in Early Irish Writings* (London, 2000), 1-25.

<sup>3</sup> *Mea autem culpa*: T.O. Clancy and G. Márkus, *Iona: The Earliest Poetry of a Celtic Monastery* (Edinburgh, 1995); for rejection of the terms, see 8-9.

<sup>4</sup> I am well aware that I tread ground familiar to readers of this journal. Ian B. Cowan, in his "The Post-Columban Church", *RSCHS*, 18 (1972-4), 245-60, arriving from rather different lines of investigation and pursuing a more institutionally based history, attempted to banish the Celtic church 30 years ago in this journal. That said, many premises recently explored as highly problematic underlie his arguments, and a return to the problems seems warranted.

concept (though not under the precise name) during the early phases of the English Reformation.<sup>5</sup> Some of its clearest articulations may be seen in Wales, during the highly successful transfer of the English Reformation to the Principality. In the first half-century of the Reformation, Welsh churchmen managed to nativise religious change to an extraordinary degree. Features of this process included the early translation of the Book of Common Prayer and the Bible into Welsh, and the publication of numerous Welsh catechetical tracts.<sup>6</sup>

One influential work of the period was the introduction to William Salesbury's translation of the New Testament in 1567, written by Bishop Richard Davies, and called *Epistol at y Cembrau*, the Epistle to the Welsh.<sup>7</sup> In it, Davies argued that the British (i.e. the Welsh) church had existed in a pristine and apostolic state, its Christianity first brought over with Joseph of Arimathea. In his scheme, Roman (i.e. Catholic) ways were a temporary aberration, a product of the direct intervention of the Pope in the sending of St Augustine to Canterbury in 597 to browbeat the British natives and infiltrate their enemies. Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica*, as always, was an essential text in this argument, and Augustine's diplomatic debacle with the British bishops at Augustine's Oak serves as the touchstone of Roman imperialism. Davies invited the reformation, thus, as a turning back to a better, more native past, away from the foreign novelties and ceremonies of papistry, and an opportunity to experience "a second flowering of the Gospel" in Wales.

Of course, such a view of the early middle ages was not confined to Reformation Wales. Early and influential Scottish and Irish Protestant writers were prompted by the same early sources, such as Bede, to produce their own re-readings of the early medieval church as a forebear of reformed denominations, severally Episcopal or Presbyterian. The Catholic reaction to these trends was not to reject, but to Catholicise the same discourse. This material has been explored to good effect in recent publications by

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<sup>5</sup> See Bradley, *Celtic Christianity*, 91-100; Meek, *Quest*, 213-15.

<sup>6</sup> Glanmor Williams, *The Welsh and their Religion: Historical Essays* (Cardiff, 1991), 37-42.

<sup>7</sup> See Glanmor Williams, *Welsh Reformation Essays* (Cardiff, 1967), 207-19.

Donald Meek and Ian Bradley, though it awaits a thorough historiographical study really to expose the discourse of these and later texts.<sup>8</sup> Even so, a mere dip into them tends, in these increasingly post-sectarian days, to produce mild discomfort. The sad fact is that both this line of discourse and, more problematically, the historical constructions born from it, predominated until very recently in Ireland and Scotland. As Richard Sharpe has demonstrated in a different context, even where scholars have been able to shed the language and rhetoric of apologetic writing and of post-reformation controversy, they have not been so ready to shed the historical narratives and organisational models envisaged by controversial writers.<sup>9</sup>

In Scotland, Bede has often been the prime text, bolstered by one or two others. Until very recently, in almost all the historical discussions of the early church in Scotland, the “Synod of Whitby” took pride of place as a watershed in the development of the insular churches, and one which had profound effect in Scotland, particularly in Iona.<sup>10</sup> In popular histories of the Celtic Church, it is often seen as marking an end, or the beginning of the end, of the story: consider how infrequently books on the Celtic Church

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<sup>8</sup> See n. 4, above; see also Colin Kidd “Antiquarianism, religion and the Scottish Enlightenment”, *Innes Review*, 46 (1995) 139-54, for later historiography.

<sup>9</sup> R. Sharpe, “Some problems concerning the organization of the church in early medieval Ireland”, *Peritia*, 3 (1984), 230-70.

<sup>10</sup> The account is in Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis anglorum*, edited in B. Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History* (Oxford, 1969), book iii, chapter 25 [citations from this will appear hereafter in the form *HE* iii.25]; also in Eddius Stephanus, *Vita Sancti Wilfrithi*, edited by B. Colgrave, *Vita Wilfridi* (Cambridge, 1927), ch. 10. For modern interpretations and their flaws, see Meek, *Quest*, 137-8; also R. Sharpe, *Adomnán of Iona: Life of St Columba* (Harmondsworth, 1995), 96-7. Note, I continue to use the term “Synod of Whitby” here, though several scholars have rejected the phrase, offering instead the defamiliarising and less dramatic “Council of Whitby” (D.N. Dumville, “Derry, Iona, England and the governance of the Columban Church”, in *Derry & Londonderry—History & Society*, ed. G. O’Brien [Dublin, 1999] 91-114), “a synod at Whitby” (Sharpe, *Adomnán*, 96) or even “a council at Whitby” (Sharpe, pers. comm.). Bede uses both *synodus* and *concilium* in *HE* iii.25.



go much beyond the year 700, or how often they suddenly leap to the late 19th-century *Carmina Gadelica*.<sup>11</sup>

In this view, the “Celtic” parties at Whitby (that is, Bishop Colmán, his Gaelic followers, and thirty or so English monks),<sup>12</sup> sorely defeated over the questions of Easter and the style of tonsure, limp off into the sunset; their “Columban” successors finally cave in to the “Roman” Easter dating in 716 (helped on, of course, by an “English” agent, bishop Ecgberht), and in 718 they accept the Petrine tonsure.<sup>13</sup> The implication of these often being the final chapters in books is that it was all downhill from there: *finit* independence and difference. The Synod, we should note, is consistently depicted (though with the occasional caveat) as a battle between Celtic and Roman standpoints, a depiction which glosses over much complexity.<sup>14</sup> For scholars, too, this basic scenario has been more or less accepted, with some deal more nuance, but only recently has the fact that we view the events of the Synod through the lenses of writers half a century and more distant from them (and writers who write in *dialogue*, in other words, who write historical fiction) entered properly into our analysis of events. As Michael Richter has recently commented, for most early medieval historians, there is an implicit creed: “In Bede We Trust”.<sup>15</sup> Most helpful in this vein have been recent papers the Cork exegetical scholar Jennifer O’Reilly and Durham religious historian Clare Stancliffe, whose readings of Bede’s *Historia* as applied exegesis, rather than straight reportage, will do much to sharpen our minds once they see publication.

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<sup>11</sup> See Meek, *Quest*, 60-78, on the *Carmina*. A noteworthy exception is J.T. McNeill, *The Celtic Churches: A History, A.D. 200 to 1200* (Chicago, 1974).

<sup>12</sup> *HE* iv.4.

<sup>13</sup> *HE* v.22; *The Annals of Ulster, to A.D. 1131*, ed. S. Mac Airt and G. Mac Niocaill (Dublin, 1983) [Hereafter *AU*], 716.4; *The Annals of Tigernach*, ed. W. Stokes (Felinfach, 1993, reprinted from *Revue Celtique*, 17 [1896] 119-263, 337-420; 18 [1897] 9-59, 150-97, 267-303) [hereafter *AT*], 718.

<sup>14</sup> Dumville, “Derry”, adopts the neutral terms “internationalising” and “traditionalist” for the opposing parties.

<sup>15</sup> *Ireland and her Neighbours in the Seventh Century* (Dublin, 1999), 89. On Bede’s literary purpose in *HE*, see B. Ward, SLG, *The Venerable Bede* (rev. edn, London, 1998), 111-33.

Scotland, of course, has another such encounter between “Celtic” and “Roman” parties. Like the marriage of the Gaelic-raised Oswiu to the Kentish-raised Eanfled which lies at the heart of the Whitby conflict, this encounter is based around a marriage. This time, the focus is the marriage of the English royal heiress Margaret, raised in strictly orthodox (because recently converted) Roman circles in Hungary, to Mael Coluim mac Donnchada (Malcolm III),<sup>16</sup> and the supposedly attendant Norman or “Roman” reform of the Scottish church. If for some with less staying power the Synod of Whitby spells the end of the Celtic Church, for many writers on Scotland, it is Margaret, bringing with her Benedictines, bright clothes, and a brood of like-minded sons into Scotland’s recalcitrantly Celtic religious world, who would change the scene forever, or begin the changes which her sons and grandsons would much more effectively establish.<sup>17</sup>

I do not wish to discuss, here, the manifold problems of the usual interpretations, the abiding myths and misreadings, both of the Synod of Whitby and equally of T’s (probably Turgot’s) Life of St Margaret, through

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<sup>16</sup> His modern historiographical sobriquet “Cenn Mór” or “Canmore”, has been consigned to the dustbin in an astute argument by A.A.M. Duncan, *The Kingship of the Scots, 842-1292: Succession and Independence* (Edinburgh, 2002), 51-2, 74-5 (though note, he is wrong to suggest that Mael Coluim III’s sometime epithet *Kenremor* is a deformation of the same term. It is instead for *Cenn Remor* “Fat-head”). Historians should note as soon as possible that this consigns the usage “Canmores” or “Canmore dynasty” to the same dustbin: the original Mael Coluim Cenn Mór was Malcolm IV the Maiden, who had no children, and therefore no dynasty. See *AU* 1164.

<sup>17</sup> An example is L. Hardinge, *The Celtic Church in Britain* (London, 1972), 28: “in Scotland, some remnants of Celtic Christians persisted until the coming of Margaret”. I owe my possession of this work to an anonymous (but a bit ominous) parcel containing it and similar literature which was sent to me not long after I gave this paper to the Society. I remain baffled, but am grateful to the donor. A balanced and thorough review of Margaret and her hagiography is Macquarrie, *Saints*, 211-29. See also next note.

which we meet the queen.<sup>18</sup> Rather, I simply wish to point out the similarities of both these moments. Both have reformers, of sorts, as protagonists (Margaret, Wilfrid), and reformers whose close contacts, in one way or another, with Europe or with Roman-trained personnel give their words and actions the semblance of a papal mission. Both accounts present us with reformers who seem to us (though presumably this was not either author's intention) ever so slightly imperialistic, and in Wilfrid's case, deeply unpleasant and arrogant. From the standpoint of these reformist moments, the status quo which each attacks can only seem "other", "un-Roman". From the standpoint of the writers of these accounts, from Bede's Jarrow with its papal protection, Italian books, and clear consciousness of the broad sweep of the catholic past; or from St Margaret's Dunfermline and Turgot's Durham, with their clear sense of the Europeanising movements within the church at large, and the constricting of what might be acceptable under the term "Christian",<sup>19</sup> what is usually called the "Celtic Church" could only have appeared strange and backward. But reformers are not balanced authorities, and reforming moments are not good ones during which to take the long-term pulse of a country's religion.

In Scotland, the situation is also complicated by a nationalist reading of these two encounters. Bede, Eddius Stephanus, Turgot; Wilfrid, Margaret: these are all English characters or writers, and their attempts to reform the "Celtic Church", or, in the writers' cases the language in which they describe these attempts, thus become items in an imperialist dialectic. Whitby is as frequently seen as a clash between Celtic and *English*, as between pro-Roman and pro-Celtic church parties. Reading Wilfrid's sneaky language at Whitby, or Margaret's patronising attitudes towards her maids in their humdrum dresses or her husband and his bear-like illiteracy, it is

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<sup>18</sup> For discussion, see D. Baker, "'A nursery of saints': St Margaret of Scotland reconsidered", in *Medieval Women: Studies presented to Rosalind M.T. Hill*, ed. D. Baker (Oxford, 1978), 119-41; L.L. Huneycutt, "The idea of the perfect princess: the *Life of St Margaret* in the reign of Matilda II (1100-1118)", *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 12 (1989), 81-98; K. Veitch, "'Replanting Paradise': Alexander I and the reform of religious life in Scotland", *Innes Review*, 52 (2001), 163-4.

<sup>19</sup> On these issues, see R. Bartlett, *The Making of Europe: Conquest, Colonization and Change, 950-1350* (London, 1993), esp. 18-23.

easy to have some sympathy with this view. But we should resist the power of these literary texts. They dramatise, personalise and simplify more complex movements of change; they present locally variant practices as touchstones of orthodoxy; they are written in very particular contexts, for certain kinds of audiences, and written to persuade. The use Scottish historiography has made of them is a tribute to their success.

My final point in relation to both these events, and their literary depictions, is that they have the potential to deprive us of the period in between, to obliterate any clear sense of religious change from 664 to 1093. Those writers who sense the end of the Celtic Church at Whitby stop there or soon after: all is a downhill slide into papacy until the Reformation. But Margaret's encounter suggests to others that the real end came in the late eleventh century: if the Celtic church was still around to dispute with, it cannot have gone away completely. Into this gap have stepped the *céli Dé*, monastic denizens of many of Scotland's ecclesiastical foundations in the period just before the twelfth century, depicted in some contexts as the hold-outs, the last gasp of the Celtic Church in Scotland.<sup>20</sup> All this allows the period after 664 to be written in the backlit glow of the pre-664 Celtic church, and allows a conflation, not just of the two encounters, but also of the pre-664 and pre-1093 churches in Scotland. What is particularly problematic in this context is that the label "Celtic" is seen as diagnostic,

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<sup>20</sup> We await thorough study of the Scottish evidence. Meanwhile, see Ian Cowan's overview entry on "Culdees", in *The Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology*, ed. N.M. de S. Cameron (Edinburgh, 1993), 226-7, as also his "Post-Columban Church"; G.W.S. Barrow, "The cathedral chapter of St Andrews and the culdees in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries", *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 3 (1953), 23-59, *idem*, *Kingdom of the Scots: Government, Church and Society from the Eleventh to the Fourteenth Century* (Edinburgh, 1973), 212-32; M.O. Anderson, "St Andrews before Alexander I", in *The Scottish Tradition: Essays in Honour of Ronald Gordon Cant*, ed. G.W.S. Barrow (Edinburgh, 1974), 1-13; T.O. Clancy, "Reformers to conservatives: *céli Dé* communities in the North-East", in *After Columba, After Calvin: Community and identity in the religious traditions of North-East Scotland*, ed. J. Porter (Aberdeen, 1999), 19-29; K. Veitch, "The conversion of native communities to the Augustinian rule in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Alba", *RSCHS*, 29 (1999), 1-22.



although it is not. The replacement by some authors of the term “Celtic” by “Columban” does nothing to help the situation, and is, if anything, worse in generalising out from a very specific nexus of ecclesiastical foundations. To describe a pre-12th century monastery as “Celtic”, or the *céli Dé* as “Celtic monks”, or the 9th-century church in Scotland as “Columban” (or even “post-Columban”), is to invite a sort of knowing assent to a cultural or religious package which we do not, in fact, understand. We do not understand it, because we have not properly investigated it.

The situation has, of course, been changing. In the past two decades, excellent historical work by the likes of Sally Foster, Ben Hudson, Alan Macquarrie, Gilbert Márkus, Simon Taylor, Kenneth Veitch and others have looked more carefully at the institutions of the period from the seventh to the eleventh centuries, and slowly new visions are emerging.<sup>21</sup> These are visions of a church not dominated so clearly as previously thought by monasticism, but instead possessed of powerful bishops and of a pastoral infrastructure. Geoffrey Barrow and John Rogers have allowed us to see

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<sup>21</sup> See S.M. Foster, *Picts, Gaels and Scots* (London, 1997); *eadem*, “The strength of belief: the impact of Christianity on early historic Scotland”, in *Religion and Belief in Medieval Europe: Papers of the “Medieval Europe Brugge 1997” Conference, volume 4*, edd. G. De Boe and F. Verhaeghe (Zellik, 1997), 229-40; B.T. Hudson, “Kings and church in early Scotland”, *Scottish Historical Review*, 73 (1994) 145-70; A. Macquarrie, “Early Christian religious houses in Scotland: foundation and function”, in *Pastoral Care before the Parish*, edd. J. Blair and R. Sharpe (Leicester, 1992), 110-33; G. Márkus, “Iona: monks, pastors and missionaries”, in *Spes Scotorum, Hope of Scots: Saint Columba, Iona and Scotland*, ed. D. Broun and T.O. Clancy (Edinburgh, 1999), 115-38; S. Taylor, “Place-names and the early church in eastern Scotland”, in *Scotland in Dark-Age Britain*, ed. B.E. Crawford (St Andrews, 1996), 93-110; K. Veitch, “The Gaelic Church in Northern Britain A.D. 664-717: a reassessment”, *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, 127 (1998), 627-47; *idem*, “The alliance between Church and State in early medieval Alba”, *Albion*, 30 (1998), 193-220. See further, D.N. Dumville, *The Churches of North Britain in the First Viking Age* (Whithorn, 1997); A. Ritchie, “Meigle and lay patronage in Tayside in the 9th and 10th centuries AD”, *Tayside and Fife Archaeological Journal*, 1 (1995), 1-10; C. Bourke, “Cillíne Pontifex”, *Innes Review*, 49 (1998), 77-80, *idem*, “Fergna Epscop”, *Innes Review*, 51 (2000), 68-71; T.O. Clancy, “Iona, Scotland and the *céli Dé*”, in Crawford, *Scotland in Dark-Age Britain*, 111-30.

the early middle ages, and not the twelfth century, as the birthplace of the Scottish parish, in all except name,<sup>22</sup> and this has been allied to recent and important work on pastoral provision in Ireland by scholars such as Richard Sharpe and Colmán Etchingham.<sup>23</sup> The latter's explorations of the importance of territorial bishops in pre-eleventh-century Ireland have yet to be understood within a Scottish context, though a forthcoming study by Dr Dauvit Broun should provide some answers.<sup>24</sup> And many writers, in particular Foster, Hudson and Veitch, as also European medievalists like Stuart Airlie and Patrick Wormald,<sup>25</sup> have stressed the active alliance of church with state in the emerging Gaelic kingdom of Alba, and its predecessor kingdom of the Picts. In these respects, both Pictland and Alba emerge as "Carolingian" polities, effective employers of religious legislation, reform and imagery to articulate power and bolster political ambition.

Nonetheless, I believe this has only addressed some problems. Many of these studies are not Scotland-wide, and have been confined instead to the kingdom of Picts, and its successor kingdom of Alba. Further, few of these studies treat of belief, the essence of religion. They concentrate instead

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<sup>22</sup> G.W.S. Barrow, "Badenoch and Strathspey, 1130-1312, 2: the church", *Northern Scotland*, 9 (1989), 1-16; J.M. Rogers, "The formation of the parish unit and community in Perthshire" (unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1992), and *idem*, "The formation of parishes in twelfth-century Perthshire", *RSCHS*, 27 (1997), 68-96; and see T.O. Clancy, "Anat in Scotland and the origins of the parish", *Innes Review*, 46 (1995), 91-115.

<sup>23</sup> Sharpe, "Some problems"; *idem*, "Churches and communities in early medieval Ireland: towards a pastoral model", in Blair and Sharpe, *Pastoral Care*, 81-109; C. Etchingham, *Church Organisation in Ireland AD 650 to 1000* (Maynooth, 1999).

<sup>24</sup> C. Etchingham, "Bishops in the Early Irish Church: a reassessment", *Studia Hibernica*, 28 (1994), 35-62, see also his discussion throughout *Church Organisation*; D. Broun and S. Taylor, *The Church of St Andrews and its Foundation Legends* (forthcoming); for a foretaste, see D. Broun, "The church of St Andrews and its foundation legend in the early twelfth century: recovering the full text of version A of the foundation legend", in *Kings, Clerics and Chronicles in Scotland, 500-1297*, ed. S. Taylor (Dublin, 2000), 108-14.

<sup>25</sup> S. Airlie, "The view from Maastricht", in *Scotland in Dark-Age Europe*, ed. B.E. Crawford (St Andrews, 1994), 33-46; P. Wormald, "The emergence of the *regnum Scotorum*: a Carolingian hegemony?", in Crawford, *Scotland in Dark-Age Britain*.

on the political dimensions of the church, and the nature of religious foundations as institutions. It becomes too easy in this way to examine religion as merely a facet of political power, rather than confronting hard and potentially controversial questions of faith and devotion. In the remainder of this paper I address two other aspects of the emerging Scottish church throughout what we now call Scotland. The first is this issue of “Celticity”: is it in any way helpful to view the church 664-1093 as “Celtic”? Second, what would trying to see this church as “catholic” do to our perspective? By “catholic”, I mean here, in broad conformity with the core beliefs, and general practices of the churches of early medieval Europe, and possessed of theological sensibilities which we can see as part of an evolving continuum with those beliefs that crystallised into doctrine throughout Europe in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

In regard to Scotland’s Celticity during this period, let me begin by stressing that neither the Gaelic kingdom of Alba which begins to be named in contemporary chronicles from *ca.* 900, and which stretched roughly from Forth to Spey, nor the kingdom of the Picts which preceded it, was all of what is now Scotland. A true religious history of Scotland, to explain effectively the past of the modern nation, must encompass the whole territory of the modern nation. Lothian and the eastern Borders had, by 700, long been under the control of and settled by the English of Bernicia, the northern kingdom of the twin polity of Northumbria. In the years around 700, the extent of “Northumbrian Scotland” was enlarged by the conquest of Galloway, and indeed by 750 the Northumbrian king Eadberht conquered the plain of Kyle in Ayrshire. It is not impossible that this was a reconquest, given that an event during the reign of Aldfrith (685–705) described by Bede may involve English inhabitants in Cunningham.<sup>26</sup> This “Northumbrian Scotland” was a place of much religious activity, in the shape of the foundation of important and impressive monasteries, or the taking over and rebuilding of previous British ones, such as Whithorn. The late Daphne Brooke’s scholarship has shown us that the English influence over regions such as Galloway was neither short-lived nor surface-

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<sup>26</sup> *HE* v.12.

deep.<sup>27</sup> From the religious culture established in this region we have important and impressive devotional art, such as the Ruthwell Cross or the related sculpture from Hoddom; and literature, such as the crucifixion poem inscribed in runes on the Ruthwell Crucifixion, and “The Miracles of Bishop Nynia”, a Latin metrical saint’s life.<sup>28</sup> This alone necessitates that any view of the emerging Scottish church in the period after 664 cannot simply apply the tag “Celtic” to the period. Any history of the church in Scotland during this period which treats the English or Northumbria as alien or foreign fails to tell the whole story, and resoundingly fails the religious heritage of the south of Scotland.

So much, I would like to think, is to state the obvious. What has been less obvious, or perhaps, less palatable to Scottish historical tastes, until recently is the extent of interaction between the northern kingdoms of Scotland and the churches of Northumbria and its English neighbours such as Mercia, in the years after 700. We know through Bede, of course, of the letter of King Nechtan mac Derilei to the abbot of Jarrow in *ca.* 712/715 requesting advice on the Easter question, and the fallout from this: Ceolfrith’s letter and gift of masons to the Pictish king, Nechtan’s declaration of the catholic date of Easter throughout his territories and monasteries, and his dedication of a church and his kingdom, according to Bede, to St Peter, and the expulsion of the *familia* of Iona, in 717 from Pictland.<sup>29</sup> Recent art-historical research, particularly that focused on the St Andrews Sarcophagus, has brought home more clearly the extent to which Nechtan’s

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<sup>27</sup> D. Brooke, “The Northumbrian settlements of Galloway and Carrick”, *PSAS*, 119 (1991), 295-327; see also P. Hill, *Whithorn and St Ninian: The Excavation of a Monastic Town* (Stroud, 1997).

<sup>28</sup> For the poetry, see M. Swanton, *The Dream of the Rood* (Manchester/New York, 1970); D. Howlett, “A reconstruction of the Ruthwell crucifixion poem”, *Studia Neophilologia*, 48 (1976), 54-8; C. Strecker, *Monumenta Germanica Historica: Poetae Latini Aevi Carolini*, IV (Berlin, 1923), 943-61; W. MacQueen, “Miracula Nynie Episcopi”, *Transactions of the Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society*, 38 (1960), 21-57; T.O. Clancy, *The Triumph Tree: Scotland’s Earliest Poetry, AD 550–1350* (Edinburgh, 1998), 121-43.

<sup>29</sup> All Bede, *HE* v.21, except for the last item, *AU* 717.4.



successors, too, were in constant contact with their English neighbours.<sup>30</sup> Unust son of Uurgust, king of the Picts from 729-761, maintained and also broke alliances with Northumbria and Mercia, something which had undoubted ramifications for Pictish sculpture, which displays clear parallels with Mercian examples.<sup>31</sup> In the later part of the eighth century, Northumbrian kings fled twice to Pictland in exile.<sup>32</sup> The names of Unust, and the Pictish kings Custantín son of Uurgust and his nephew, Eogenan, were inscribed in the *Liber Vitae* of Lindisfarne, then probably kept at Jarrow.<sup>33</sup>

If we turn to the situation in the Gaelic north-west in the eighth century, here too, there is good evidence of continued contact between Northumbria and the Gaelic church in the century after Whitby and beyond. The letters of Aldhelm in the seventh and Alcuin in the eighth remind us that English churchmen continued to be trained in Ireland, and to look to Irish clerics as paragons of scholarship.<sup>34</sup> We know of individual instances of contact: Aldfrith, famed as a religious scholar, Flann Fína, in Ireland, was studying

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<sup>30</sup> See D. MacLean, "The Northumbrian perspective", in *The St Andrews Sarcophagus: A Pictish Masterpiece and its International Connections*, ed. S.M. Foster (Dublin, 1998), 179-201; S.J. Plunkett, "The Mercian perspective", in *ibid.*, 202-26. For an attempt to build a picture of Northumbrian hegemony in Orkney, see R. Lamb, "Carolingian Orkney and its transformation", in *The Viking Age in Caithness, Orkney and the North Atlantic*, edd. C.E. Batey, J. Jesch and C.D. Morris (Edinburgh, 1993), 260-71.

<sup>31</sup> See *ibid.*, and also A. Woolf, "A Verturian hegemony: a mirror in the north", in *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe*, edd. M.P. Brown and C.A. Farr (London/New York, 2001), 106-11.

<sup>32</sup> Symeon of Durham, *Historia Regum Anglorum* in *Symeonis Monachi Opera Omnia*, ed. T. Arnold (Rolls Series, 1882-5), ii, 45, 57; for comment, see also K. Forsyth, "Evidence of a lost Pictish source in the *Historia Regum Anglorum*", in Taylor, *Kings, Clerics and Chronicles*, 19-34, at 31.

<sup>33</sup> First highlighted by Airlie, "View from Maastricht", 41-3; see J. Gerschow, *Die Gedenküüberlieferung der Angelsachsen* (Berlin, 1988), 149-54 (nos 43, 80, 100).

<sup>34</sup> See, for references, James F. Kenney, *The Sources for the Early History of Ireland: Ecclesiastical* (New York, 1929, repr. 1979), 226-7, 534-6; a good review is Richter, *Ireland and her Neighbours*, 137-56.

on Iona when called to the Northumbrian kingship in 685.<sup>35</sup> The Irish-trained English monk Ecgberht, who had previously spent time both amongst Gaels and Picts, chose to see out his last days in Iona, where he saw and had a hand in their conversion to the catholic Easter, and died there in 729.<sup>36</sup> In 756, the abbot of Iona, Sléibíne, visited the Northumbrian monastery of Ripon.<sup>37</sup> None of these things seems to indicate a cessation of contact between the Gaelic and the English churches, and the final conversion of Iona and its dependencies to the catholic Easter can only have improved matters. The question of the origin of the form of the high crosses which make their appearance on Iona in the eighth century is contentious, but Northumbrian sculpture, especially the sorts of free-standing crosses seen at Ruthwell and Bewcastle, remains a likely source.<sup>38</sup>

Finally, in Pictland again, we should not see in the expulsion of the family of Iona in 717 the end of Gaelic and Pictish church relationships. Under Unust son of Uurgust, Pictland seems to have dominated Gaelic Dál Riata, and his successors Custantin and Unust son of Uurgust may also

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<sup>35</sup> C. Ireland, "Aldfrith of Northumbria and the Irish genealogies", *Celtica*, 22 (1991), 64-78; *idem*, "Aldfrith of Northumbria and the learning of a *sapiens*", in *A Celtic Florilegium: Studies in Memory of Brendan O Hehir*, edd. K.A. Klar, E.E. Sweetser and C. Thomas (Lawrence, Mass., 1996), 63-77; A.P. Smyth, *Warlords and Holy Men: Scotland AD 80-1000* (London, 1984), 128-31. His location on Iona is from the anonymous *Vita Sancti Cuthberti*, B. Colgrave, *Two Lives of St Cuthbert* (Cambridge, 1940), 104-5. For an overview of Aldfrith as king, see D.P. Kirby, *The Earliest English Kings* (rev. edn, London, 2000), 118-23.

<sup>36</sup> Bede, *HE* iii.4, 27, v.8, 22.

<sup>37</sup> K. Hughes, "Evidence for contact between the churches of the Irish and the English from the Synod of Whitby to the Viking Age", in *England before the Conquest*, edd. P. Clemoes and K. Hughes (London, 1971), 55; J.T. Koch, *The Gododdin of Aneirin: Text and Context from Dark-Age North Britain* (Cardiff, 1997), cxxv-cxxvi.

<sup>38</sup> On which see RCAHMS, *Argyll*, vol. 4: *Iona* (Edinburgh, 1982), 17-19; but see D. Kelly, "The relationships of the crosses of Argyll", in *The Age of Migrating Ideas: Early Medieval Art in Northern Britain and Ireland*, edd. R.M. Spearman and J. Higgitt (Edinburgh/Stroud, 1993), 219-29. Unless I read him incorrectly, Ian Fisher maintains the Northumbrian inspiration of the free-standing or high cross in his recent *Early Medieval Sculpture in the West Highlands and Islands* (Edinburgh, 2001), 15-16, 22.

have held some sort of hegemony in Dál Riata.<sup>39</sup> There are reasons to speculate that Custantin and his brother had contact with the contemporary abbot of Iona, and John Bannerman has suggested that during this period, the idea of dividing the Columban *familia* into two new monasteries, one at Kells and one at Dunkeld, was hatched.<sup>40</sup> We may also look to the sculpture of this period, as also the continued use of the Irish script ogam on Pictish monuments, and indeed the use of Gaelic orthography for Pictish names on monuments such as the Dupplin Cross or St Vigean's 1, to see the continued level of Gaelic influence in the Pictish church.<sup>41</sup>

If we turn to the dedications of churches to saints in Pictland, we can also see the mixed inheritance of the Pictish church in the eighth century. Although we have no secure dating for the series of churches in Pictland which employ the generic *\*eglés*, (e.g. Ecclesgrieg, Ecclespether, Exmagirdle) it seems likely that many of these belong to the period around 700 or slightly later. Among these churches, we see dedications to universal saints such as John, Peter, Martin, Cyricius; as well as Gaelic saints such as Grillán or Benén; and Pictish saints such as Nechtan.<sup>42</sup> Such a study of saints' dedications reveals in Pictland, just as does its sculpture, a culturally mixed religious inheritance.

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<sup>39</sup> D. Broun, "Pictish kings 761-839: integration with Dál Riata or separate development?" in Foster, *St Andrews Sarcophagus*, 71-83, though he does not advance this view with any force.

<sup>40</sup> Clancy, "Iona, Scotland and the céli Dé"; J. Bannerman, "The Scottish takeover of Pictland and the relics of Columba", in Broun and Clancy, *Spes Scotorum*, 71-94. Note, the plausibility of Bannerman's argument concerning the relics does not depend on his interpretation of the late 8th-century kings of Pictland as Gaels, which is contradicted by Broun, "Pictish kings".

<sup>41</sup> K. Forsyth, "The inscriptions on the Dupplin Cross", in *From the Isles of the North: Medieval Art in Ireland and Britain (Proceedings of the Third International Conference on Insular Art)*, ed. C. Bourke (Belfast, 1995), 237-44; T.O. Clancy, "The Drosten Stone: a new reading", *PSAS*, 123 (1993), 345-53.

<sup>42</sup> G.W.S. Barrow, "The childhood of Scottish Christianity: a note on some place-name evidence", *Scottish Studies*, 27 (1983), 1-15; S. Taylor, "Place-names and the early church in Scotland", *RSCHS*, 28 (1998), 1-22: 3-7.

Moving forward to the later ninth century and the tenth, the cultural background of Scotland's churches blurs and complexifies. The creation of the Gaelic kingdom of Alba upon the roots of the old kingdom of the Picts without question involved a merger of that kingdom's religious influences with those of the Gaelic aristocracy. We know that a certain amount of reformist and anti-Pictish language was later used in the legends of the creation of this new kingdom.<sup>43</sup> Nonetheless, integration of sorts helps to explain some aspects of the place-name record, and the nature of both land-holding and church establishment in the new kingdom. Moreover, this new kingdom of Alba was not a static one: it was expansionist, taking over parts of Lothian by 963, all of it by 1018.<sup>44</sup> This involved new relationships with the church in Lothian, best seen in the growing interest of Scottish kings in the cult of St Cuthbert in the later eleventh century.<sup>45</sup> Of course, it also continued to have close relationships with Ireland: Máire Herbert has revealed, in a series of important recent articles, the close dynastic connections of Cinaed mac Ailpín and his descendants with Irish royal houses.<sup>46</sup> One royal uncle, for instance, sensibly left behind dynastic bloodshed for a quiet death on pilgrimage in St Andrews in the tenth century.<sup>47</sup> We may also point to close relationships with Armagh during

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<sup>43</sup> M.O. Anderson, *Kings and Kingship in Early Scotland* (rev. edn, Edinburgh, 1980), 249-50; Clancy, "Iona, Scotland and the céli Dé", 122-3; Wormald, "Emergence of the *regnum Scotorum*".

<sup>44</sup> See M.O. Anderson, "Lothian and the early Scottish kings", *SHR*, 39 (1960), 98-112.

<sup>45</sup> On which, see W.M. Aird, "St Cuthbert, the Scots and the Normans", *Anglo-Norman Studies*, 16 (1993), 1-20; G.W.S. Barrow, "The kings of Scotland and Durham", in *Anglo-Norman Durham, 1093-1193*, edd. D. Rollason *et al.* (Woodbridge, 1994), 311-23.

<sup>46</sup> M. Herbert, "The legacy of Columba", in *Celebrating Columba: Irish-Scottish Connections, 597-1997*, edd. T.M. Devine and J.F. McMillan (Edinburgh, 1999), 1-14; "Sea-divided Gaels? Constructing relationships between Irish and Scots c. 800-1169", in *Britain and Ireland, 900-1300: Insular responses to Medieval European Change*, ed. B. Smith (Cambridge, 1999), 87-97; "*Rí Éirenn, Rí Alban*: kingship and identity in the ninth and tenth centuries", in Taylor, *Kings, Clerics and Chronicles*, 62-72.

<sup>47</sup> *Chronicum Scotorum*, ed. W. Hennessey (Rolls Series, 1866), s.a. 964.



these centuries, as the training of several Scottish churchmen there suggests.<sup>48</sup>

In the south-west the situation is more complex yet. The creation of the kingdom of Cumbria in the years after 870 saw for a time the territory between Govan and Penrith under the same rulers, yet this territory had previously belonged to a patchwork of cultures and several different ecclesiastical backgrounds.<sup>49</sup> Although we can point to the export of cults of local saints like Kentigern into the southern parts of this kingdom during these years, we should also look to this sort of context for the continuance of English cults, such as those of Oswald and Cuthbert, and indeed, an expansion in the cult of St Patrick, whose birth-place was held, rightly or wrongly, to have been at Old Kilpatrick on the Clyde. It is striking that the multicultural nature of Cumbria can be found in the nomenclature of the 12th century: the Cumbric name element Cos-/Gos-, cf. Welsh *gwas*, is used in various names as a prefix to that of a local saint. We know of only a few names of this type in Cumbria, but they are: Cos/Gospatrik; Cosmungho; Coscutbricht; Cososwold.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> For example, Cadroe, on whom see now D.N. Dumville, "St Cathróe of Metz and the hagiography of exoticism", in *Studies in Irish Hagiography: Saints and Scholars*, edd. J. Carey, M. Herbert and P. Ó Riain (Dublin, 2001), 172-88.

<sup>49</sup> Cumbria is in need of renewed attention in print, but for an overview, see Smyth, *Warlords and Holy Men*, 215-38; still important are D.P. Kirby "Strathclyde and Cumbria: a survey of historical development to 1092", *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society [TCWAAS]*, n.s. 62 (1962), 77-94, which should be read with P.A. Wilson, "On the use of the terms 'Strathclyde' and 'Cumbria'", *TCWAAS*, n.s. 66 (1966), 57-92; K.H. Jackson, "Angles and Britons in Northumbria and Cumbria", in *Angles and Britons* (Oxford, 1963), 71-83. Revision has been set in train by B.T. Hudson, "Elech and the Scots in Strathclyde", *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, 15 (1988), 145-9; and work on Govan's art and architecture: *Govan and its Early Medieval Sculpture*, ed. A. Ritchie (Stroud, 1994); S.T. Driscoll, "Church archaeology in Glasgow and the kingdom of Strathclyde", *Innes Review* 49 (1998), 95-114. C. Phythian-Adams, *Land of the Cumbrians: A Study in British provincial Origins, A.D. 400-1120* (Aldershot, 1996), is crucial for Cumberland, but more problematic for Strathclyde.

<sup>50</sup> For further discussion, see Clancy, "Scottish saints", 411; see G.F. Black, *The Surnames of Scotland* (New York, 1946), 174, for instances of some of these names.

If we add into this equation the fact that in the western and northern seaboard, Scandinavian settlements had also been christianised during this period, I feel I can rest my case that the label “Celtic” does little to represent the culturally mixed backgrounds of the churches of Scotland during this period, and the intense cultural cross-fertilisation evident in both artwork and place-names. Importantly, here, we should note the probable eastward movements of saints’ cults during these centuries: the cults of Cowal saints brought to Fife and Strathearn; Argyll saints brought to Atholl and Moray; Kintyre saints to Ayrshire and Galloway.<sup>51</sup> The gradual commonality of this previously most localising of aspects contributes to a growing sense that, even in the absence of a coherent nation or even a proper *ecclesia Scoticana*, we may over these centuries begin to speak of a sort of Scottish church, taking Scotland as the territory in which all these different aspects were shared, exchanged or imposed, but beyond which such interaction is both unlikely and unexpected.

We may add to this the more obviously European dimensions of the early Scottish church. Alongside the many instances of Gaelic churchmen who made their way to Carolingian and Ottonian Europe during the period under question, some of these were arguably or certainly Scottish, or from Scottish monasteries. We may point in our period to Virgil of Salzburg (mid eighth, perhaps trained in Iona), and Dicuil the Cosmographer (early ninth, certainly familiar with the Scottish islands), and Cadroe of Metz (mid-tenth).<sup>52</sup> What these three illustrate is the essential unity of catholic belief in Scotland as in Europe at this period. Although some such churchmen on the continent joined or even founded Benedictine monasteries, or in Cadroe’s case joined the strong tenth-century Benedictine reform movement, there is little or no indication that they, or the various European

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<sup>51</sup> This needs to be investigated more thoroughly, but one may cite examples such as Cowal saints Kessog (Luss, Auchterarder, Comrie, Callander), Bláán (Bute, Dunblane), Cattán (Bute, Aberuthven); Argyll saints Mo Luag, Mael Ruba, and Columba; “Kintyre saints” Constantine, Colmán Elo, Ciarán, Michael. On this last point, see J. MacQueen, “The Gaelic speakers of Galloway and Carrick”, *Scottish Studies*, 17 (1973), 17-33. The idea has been mooted in a journalistic setting by Alex Woolf in *Scotland’s Story* (Glasgow, 1999), part 5, 11-12

<sup>52</sup> See Kenney, *Sources*, 523-6, 545-8, 609-10.

churchmen they encountered, thought that their religious background in Scotland or Ireland made them particularly odd. Granted, there was a set-to over the orthodoxy of some of the beliefs of Virgil of Salzburg – a set-to which he seems to have won – nonetheless in this controversy it was never implied that it was because he came from a country that was religiously odd that he held such differing views.<sup>53</sup> Later medieval texts, such as from the 12th century, begin to reveal a slightly different story, of satires on Irish monks who believe in St Brendan's voyage and the like,<sup>54</sup> but this only becomes significant if we wish it to.

So too, we may note during this same period the recourse of various people, both churchmen and royalty, to Rome as a place of pilgrimage. Such people came from all corners of Scotland. In 721, Fergustus Pictus, a bishop in Ireland but previously active in Pictland, and Sedulius, a Gaelic bishop, perhaps of the kingdom of Dumbarton, were at a council in Rome.<sup>55</sup> In the early ninth century, an Irish teenager called Fintan was kidnapped by Vikings, but escaped from them in Orkney. Befriended by the local (Pictish, we must presume) bishop, who spoke Irish because he had been trained in Ireland, Fintan survived the experience, and subsequently journeyed to Tours, and ultimately Rome to give thanks, became a priest in 851, and retired as a hermit to the island of Rheinau, in the Rhine near Konstanz, where he died c. 878.<sup>56</sup> In 854, Indrechtach, abbot of Iona, was murdered whilst en route to Rome by Saxons: a cult developed in

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<sup>53</sup> J. Carey, "Ireland and the Antipodes: the heterodoxy of Virgil of Salzburg", *Speculum*, 64 (1989), 1-10, reprinted in *The Otherworld Voyage in Early Irish Literature: An Anthology of Criticism* (Dublin, 2000), 133-42.

<sup>54</sup> For these verses, see M. Esposito, "An apocryphal 'Book of Enoch and Elias'", in Wooding, *The Otherworld Voyage*, 40-1; translation by K. Jankulak, *ibid.*, 250.

<sup>55</sup> *Sacrorum Conciliorum nova et amplissima Collectio*, ed. J.D. Mansi (repr. Graz, 1960-2), xii, 261-6: the precise phrasing of their titles is: *Sedulius episcopus Britanniae de genere Scotorum* and *Fergustus episcopus Scotiae Pictus*, *ibid.*, xii, 265.

<sup>56</sup> Kenney, *Sources*, 602-3; W.P.L. Thomson, "St Findan and the Pictish-Norse transition" and C. Omand (tr.), "The Life of St Findan", in *The People of Orkney*, edd. R.J. Berry and H.N. Firth (Kirkwall, 1986), 279-87.

Glastonbury of St Indracht.<sup>57</sup> I have harboured the conviction, without proof, on another occasion that he may have been following his predecessor, Diarmait, abbot of Iona, to the continent. Uniquely of all the abbots of Iona, we do not have an obit for Diarmait, and I have wondered if he died on the continent.<sup>58</sup> Certainly someone from Iona was there in the 830s or 840s, bringing news of the martyrdom of Blathmac mac Flainn at the hands of Vikings to the ears of Walahfrid Strabo, who composed heroic verse in his honour.<sup>59</sup>

To these clerical journeyers we may add, by the tenth century, lay pilgrims.<sup>60</sup> Dyfnwallon son of Owein, king of Cumbria died on pilgrimage in Rome in 975; The Chronicle of the Kings of Alba tells us that two men, Leot and Sluagadach, went to Rome on pilgrimage in the reign of Culén, king of Alba (966-71).<sup>61</sup> These are sporadic notices, and hardly testify to any great continental traffic to Rome from Scotland, but all these are in the years before such travel became in any way commonplace from Britain and Ireland. The eleventh century saw a great explosion of pilgrimages from Ireland to Europe, and Scotland added to these royal journeys by Earl Thorfinn of Orkney, Macbethad, king of Alba, in 1050, and Echmarcach,

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<sup>57</sup> *AU* 854.3; M. Lapidge, "The cult of St Indract at Glastonbury", in *Ireland in Early Medieval Europe*, edd. D. Whitelock, R. McKitterick and D. Dumville (Cambridge, 1982), 179-217.

<sup>58</sup> Clancy, "Iona, Scotland and the céli Dé", 112.

<sup>59</sup> Edited in *Pinkerton's Lives of the Scottish Saints*, ed. W.M. Metcalfe, 2 vols (Paisley, 1889), ii, 293-7; A.O. Anderson, *Early Sources of Scottish History*, 2 vols (1922; rev. edn. Stamford, 1990), i, 263-5. Blathmac's death is noted *AU* 825.17.

<sup>60</sup> For the context of what follows, see A. Gwynn, "Ireland and the continent in the eleventh century", *Irish Historical Studies*, 8 (1953), 193-216; reprinted in *idem*, *The Irish Church in the 11th and 12th Centuries*, ed. G. O'Brien (Dublin, 1992), 34-49, the version I have used, at 35-7; K. Hughes, *The Church in Early Irish Society* (London, 1966), 253-6; *eadem*, *Early Christian Ireland: An Introduction to the Sources* (Ithaca, NY, 1972), 277-8; T.O. Clancy, "Brendan's European Tour: the Middle Irish poem 'Mochen Mochen, a Brenaind' and the changing nature of pilgrimage in the 11th century", forthcoming in *Studies in the Brendan Legend*, edd. C. Strijbosch, G. Burgess and G. Orlandi (Leiden, 2004).

<sup>61</sup> Anderson, *Early Sources*, i, 480; Anderson, *Kings and Kingship*, 252.



king of the Rhinns of Galloway in 1064.<sup>62</sup> It should also be noted that to all these we should add secondary contacts, in the form of diplomatic missions between England and Scotland, and the art historical evidence certainly lends some credence to continuing contacts during these centuries.

All of the above tends to suggest that Christianity in Scotland during the period between 664 and 1093, while possessed of very distinctive and local reflections, was not capable of being described by the label “Celtic” with any accuracy. A series of kingdom-based or language-based “churches” interacted heavily with each other on multiple levels; and the churches in Scotland remained aware of and sometimes in touch with the churches of England, Ireland and mainland Europe. At this stage I’d like to suggest as a debating point, rather than with any firm conviction, that if we need a label to describe what Christianity in Scotland was like at this period, that label should be “catholic”.

The term “catholic” is a useful one: it is a term which describes a church orthodox in belief and united in general self-conception, whilst not necessarily implying thereby any standardisation of practice, institutions, cult or liturgy. It, and not “Roman”, is in any case the best term to describe the early medieval church generally, where throughout Europe, despite the usual acknowledgement of the ecclesiastical priority of the bishop of Rome, and the fitful pervasiveness of Roman church legacy (largely through the dissemination of the practices of Rome through the mechanisms of the Carolinian state), the way in which the church was actually governed, the way in which liturgy was observed, the way in which saints were culted was still intensely local. Nonetheless, belief and those practices and aspects of liturgy which touched on orthodox theology were at least in theory constant—or shall we say, enjoyed a continuum—throughout these regions. I don’t think we should shy away from this term as a sectarian one; rather, we should allow Christianity in early medieval Scotland to step out from the badly cast rôle of proto-protestantism, and assume its rightful place as a church belonging to a wider European world which had, like Scotland,

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<sup>62</sup> Anderson, *Early Sources*, i, 588, 592; Clancy, “Brendan’s European tour”; see in general also B.T. Hudson, “Gaelic princes and Gregorian reform”, in *Crossed Paths*, edd. B.T. Hudson and V. Ziegler (Lanham, MD, 1991), 61-82.

local practices and anomalies, unique resolutions of issues of organisation and authority, and problematic and evolving understandings of the theological implications of core Christian beliefs.

I would like to look at some ways in which that church could be said to be observably “catholic”, in the meaning I have just given, rather than peculiarly “Celtic”. It is to the evidence of art history and literature that I wish to turn to do this. What is striking, I believe, is the extent to which we can see the development here of devotional aspects which, changed and deepened during the later middle ages, are the very hallmark of what we often think of as medieval catholicism. I would like to be deliberately provocative about this. In his 1997 book, Oliver Davies cordoned off a triad of themes which he thought made Celtic Christianity distinct, and which he saw as strongly present in medieval Welsh Christianity, the main subject of the book. These were a stress on community, on the conversion away from the world, and on the Trinity.<sup>63</sup> We can argue about whether any of these is strongly Celtic or Welsh: the three themes I would like to explore in the second half of this paper as marking Scotland’s Christianity in the early middle ages out as “catholic” are: the atonement as understood in the crucifixion, the real presence in the Eucharist, and the cult of Mary the Virgin Mother of God.<sup>64</sup>

To date, these aspects of religion in Scotland, or indeed in Ireland, have predominantly been discussed not by historians *per se*, but by art historians and exegetical scholars such as Eamonn Ó Carragain, Jennifer O’Reilly, Jane Hawkes, and our own Isabel Henderson in their attempts to understand the cultural background to sculptures and manuscripts. The dense network of liturgy, exegesis, and symbolism which they envisage in relation to these various devotional aspects is rather too complicated to

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<sup>63</sup> O. Davies, *Celtic Christianity in Early Medieval Wales: The Origins of the Welsh Spiritual Tradition* (Cardiff, 1997), 66-8.

<sup>64</sup> I have not chosen these as emblems of my thrawnness. All three were problematic themes with early medieval Christianity in Europe, and I am heavily indebted to the discussion of these in J. Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition. A History of the Development of Doctrine*, vol. 3: *The Growth of Medieval Theology (600-1300)* (Chicago and London, 1978), esp. chs. 3 and 4.

discuss here in detail. Rather I want to point briefly to the evidence we have for the development of certain aspects of devotion in Scotland in the early middle ages. What I want to emphasise is that I have chosen aspects of devotion for which there is some evidence, literary, or art historical, from multiple corners of Scotland: from Northumbrian Galloway, from Pictland and later from Alba, from Iona or Argyll, and I hope that this will add credence to the notion I am peddling here, about the shared, “catholic” nature of Scotland during this period.

It has been widely recognised by art historians that the promotion of the cult of the Holy Cross by Pope Sergius I in the late seventh century probably led to some of the explosion of interest in it both in a theological and an artistic framework, during the latter years of that century and throughout the eighth.<sup>65</sup> We may cite, for instance, Adomnán, who describes in detail in his *De Locis Sanctis* the elaborate ceremony of veneration of these relics in Hagia Sophia in Constantinople during the feast of the Holy Cross; we may further cite, although they may not be completely linked, the beginnings in the eighth century of the elaboration of standing crosses across the insular world.<sup>66</sup> These are not simple images: they portray, more often than not, schemes of salvation, and are intricately linked to evolving ideas about the passion of Christ and the nature of the atonement.<sup>67</sup>

Without doubt the most impressive and important of these monuments in Scotland is the Ruthwell Cross. A product of the Northumbrian church, it wears its influences from the world of Roman and Roman-inspired art visibly, as also its Anglo-Saxon affiliations, in the portions of a poem carved

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<sup>65</sup> E. Ó Carragáin, “Liturgical innovations associated with Pope Sergius and the iconography of the Ruthwell and Bewcastle crosses”, in *Bede and Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. R.T. Farrell (Oxford, 1978), 131-47; *idem*, “Christ over the beasts and the Agnus Dei: two multivalent panels on the Ruthwell and Bewcastle crosses”, in *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Culture*, edd. P. Szarmach and V. Oggins (Kalamazoo, MI, 1986), 377-403.

<sup>66</sup> Adomnán, *De Locis Sanctis*, ed. D. Meehan (Dublin, 1958), iii, 3; I. Fisher, *Early Medieval Sculpture*, 15-16, and see note 38 above.

<sup>67</sup> On which see Pelikan, *Growth of Medieval Theology*, 129-44; also S. McEntire, “The devotional context of the cross before A.D. 1000”, in Szarmach and Oggins, *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Culture*, 345-56.

in runes along the sides. Although the crucifixion scene is much abraded – the effects of the 17th-century reformers who almost destroyed the cross – it is still present at the base.<sup>68</sup> While this may not seem at first sight a prominent position in the artistic scheme of things, John Higgitt has taught us to think of this lower position on crosses in terms of liturgical or devotional usage: the crucifixion is low to the ground, because there one can easily venerate it when one is on one's knees.<sup>69</sup> Nonetheless, the cross itself acts as the clear emblem of the passion here, and the poem inscribed on its sides speaks with the voice of the cross, the instrument of passion. Eamonn Ó Carragáin has discussed in detail the way in which this poem, “The Ruthwell Crucifixion Poem” has a carefully moulded theological intent, based around a confirmation of the unified divinity and humanity of Christ as against the monothelite heresy which was a concern of the period ca.700.<sup>70</sup> I quote here from my translation of that poem, based on David Howlett's reconstruction of it:<sup>71</sup>

I.

+ God almighty stripped himself, when he wished to climb the cross  
bold before all men.  
to bow [I dared not,  
but had to stand firm.]

II.

I held high the great King,  
heaven's Lord. I dared not bend.  
Men mocked us both together. I was slick with blood  
spr[ung from the Man's side....]

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<sup>68</sup> On the cross generally, see the essays in *The Ruthwell Cross*, ed. B. Cassidy (Princeton, NJ, 1992).

<sup>69</sup> J. Higgitt, “Words and crosses: the inscribed stone cross in early medieval Britain and Ireland”, in *Early Medieval Sculpture in Britain and Ireland*, ed. J. Higgitt (Oxford, 1986), 125-51.

<sup>70</sup> E. Ó Carragáin, “The Ruthwell Crucifixion Poem in its iconographic and liturgical contexts”, *Peritia*, 6-7 (1987-88), 1-71.

<sup>71</sup> Clancy, *Triumph Tree*, 121; Howlett, “Reconstruction”.



### III.

+ Christ was on the cross.

But then quick ones came from afar,  
nobles, all together. I beheld it all.

I was hard hit with grief; I bowed [to warrior's hands.]

### IV.

Wounded with spears,  
they laid him, limb-weary. At his body's head they stood.  
There they looked to [heaven's Lord....]

As Ó Carragáin points out, this particular theological line is less emphasised in the full poem of "The Dream of the Rood" found in the later Vercelli manuscript. The relationship between the Ruthwell poem and "The Dream of the Rood" is close but uncertain. Nonetheless, it is in that complete poem that we get the full force of the poet's vision, albeit it may be a later reworking of the material carved on the Ruthwell Cross.

Listen! The best of dreams I will describe,  
which I dreamed at midnight,  
when living men lay asleep.  
It seemed I saw a splendid tree  
soaring aloft, wound round with light,  
the brightest of boughs. That beacon was all  
girded with gold: gems stood  
fair at its foot and five also were  
on the cross-beam above. All God's angels kept it,  
fair through their creation: truly no criminal's cross,  
but holy souls beheld it there,  
men upon earth, and all this great making.  
Wondrous was that triumph-tree, and I tainted with sin,  
wounded with wrongness. I saw the tree of glory  
adorned with vestments, vividly shining,  
got out with gold; gems had  
worthily wreathed the Ruler's tree.

Still through that gold I could sense  
the former pains of wretches, for it first began  
to bleed on its right side. I was all beset with sorrows,  
I was afraid at this fair sight. I saw that flickering beacon  
changing cloths and colours: now it was soaked in wetness,  
drenched with dripping blood; now, adorned with jewels.  
Yet, lying there a long while  
I sadly gazed at the Saviour's tree,  
until I heard that it held forth;  
the best of woods began to speak words.<sup>72</sup>

A contemporary Irish poet also depicted the crucifixion in heroic terms. Blathmac mac Con Brettan is the premiere Gaelic religious poet of the eighth century. We do not know where he was active as a poet, although his family came from an area which is in modern day Co. Louth in Ireland. I introduce him as evidence in this context simply because the text of his poems shares a manuscript tradition with others linked very clearly with Iona, and because traditions relating to his family display Columban links also.<sup>73</sup> Blathmac's diptych of poems addressed to the Virgin Mary are understated but important works which should be better known than they are. In the first, he calls on Mary to come to help him keen for the death of

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<sup>72</sup> This trans. from Clancy, *Triumph Tree*, 122-5. There are many editions and many other translations: see, e.g., B. Dickins and A.S.C. Ross, *The Dream of the Rood* (London, 1934); M. Swanton, *The Dream of the Rood* (Manchester and New York, 1970); J.C. Pope, *Seven Old English Poems* (New York, 2nd edn. 1981), 9-15; and most recently in a Scottish context, Robert Crawford's translation in *Scottish Religious Poetry: An Anthology*, edd. M. Bateman, R. Crawford and J. McGonigal (Edinburgh, 2000), 16-25. For discussion of textual relationships, see the editions cited, and also Howlett, "Reconstruction", and Ó Carragáin, "Ruthwell Crucifixion Poem".

<sup>73</sup> On Blathmac, see the introduction to Carney's edition, *The Poems of Blathmac son of Cú Brettan* (Irish Texts Society, Dublin, 1964), as also on the manuscript, which contains Columban poems such as Beccán mac Luigdech's *Fo réir Choluimb*, the *Amra Choluimb Chille*, and also a prayer attributed to Adomnán. The Columban links of this Irish family have yet to be properly explored.

her son: in the course of the poem he relates much of the narrative of Christ's life, and passion; the second half of the poem is a long meditation on the crucifixion and its meaning; some of its discussion of the restraint of nature at the death of its lord; and subsequently his description of nature keening its lord, bear resemblance to the restraint of the Cross in "The Dream of the Rood" and the Ruthwell Crucifixion Poem and the keening by nature of Christ in the Dream as well.<sup>74</sup>

It is important that we can parallel these images with artistic ones, not just among the later high crosses of Ireland, like the Tower Cross at Kells, but also in Pictland. Few images from ninth- or tenth-century crosses with crucifixions which remain to us are undamaged, but crucifixion plaques from Ireland give us some sense of what they might have looked like (these crucifixion plaques were originally intended as ornaments for the covers of gospel books).<sup>75</sup> The Camuston Cross, though the most damaged, is the most intriguing, since it juxtaposes an image of an archer near the transom with a somewhat squashed depiction of the crucifixion on the transom itself.<sup>76</sup> This bears some resemblance to the layout and thus potential appearance of the Ruthwell Cross. There are other links between Camuston and Northumbrian sculpture, for instance, with the cross-head from Durham; and with one of the finest of Pictish monuments, the Dupplin Cross.<sup>77</sup> At Monifeith, the crucifixion becomes part of an overall programme

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<sup>74</sup> Carney, *Poems of Blathmac*, §§121-9. For some discussion of Blathmac's poetry, see J. Carney, "Poems of Blathmac, son of Cú Brettan", in Carney (ed.) *Early Irish Poetry* (Cork, 1965), 45-57; B. Lambkin, "The structure of the Blathmac poems", *Studia Celtica*, 20-1 (1985-6), 67-77; G. Márkus, "Do Macc Maire: Mary's tears and our salvation", *Spirituality*, 6 (May-June 1996), 165-70.

<sup>75</sup> On crucifixion plaques, see C. Bourke, "The chronology of Irish crucifixion plaques", in Spearman and Higgitt, *Age of Migrating Ideas*, 175-81.

<sup>76</sup> J. Romilly Allen and J. Anderson, *The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland* [henceforth *ECMS*] (1903, repr. in 2 vols., Balgavies, 1993), ii, 252-4.

<sup>77</sup> For Durham Cross, see *Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Stone Sculpture*, vol. 1: *Co Durham and Northumberland*, ed. R. Cramp (Oxford, 1984), pt. ii, pls 43-4; for Dupplin, see I. Henderson, "The Dupplin Cross: a preliminary consideration of its art historical context", in *Northumbria's Golden Age*, edd. J. Hawkes and S. Mills (Stroud, 1998), 161-77.

of biblical imagery; at Abernethy, the crucifixion appears to have the three Maries mourning at the tomb, an image which also to some extent recalls some of the imagery of the Ruthwell Cross: the visitation; and Mary Magdelene washing the feet of Jesus.<sup>78</sup>

The emphasis on the salvific power of the cross is not confined either to meditations on the passion, or the imagery of the passion itself. Both poetry, and also sculpture, show the idea of the sign of the cross as itself having salvific power. This is plentifully instanced in hagiography of the seventh and eighth centuries;<sup>79</sup> it also comes out full force in the poetry of Muirgú, abbot of Iona and Kells in the late tenth century, whose “breastplate” poem, essentially a protection prayer, signs the cross all over his body.<sup>80</sup>

Christ’s cross across this face,  
across the ear like this,  
Christ’s cross across this eye,  
Christ’s cross across this nose.

Christ’s cross across this mouth.  
Christ’s cross across this throat.  
Christ’s cross across this back.  
Christ’s cross across this side....

From the tip of my head  
to the nail of my foot,  
Christ, against each peril  
the shelter of your cross.

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<sup>78</sup> *ECMS*, ii, 265 and fig. 274 (Monifeith no. 4), ii, 310 and fig. 325 (Abernethy no. 4). As with Camuston, Abernethy deserves to be compared with Anglo-Saxon sculpture: see Aycliffe in Cramp, *Corpus vol. 1*, pt II, pl. 7. On the Maries, see C. Farr, “Worthy women on the Ruthwell Cross: woman as sign in early Anglo-Saxon monasticism”, in *The Insular Tradition*, ed. R.T. Farrell (Albany, NY, 1997), 45-61

<sup>79</sup> For example, Adomnán, *Vita Columbae*, ii.16.

<sup>80</sup> Edition and translation in G. Murphy, *Early Irish Lyrics* (Oxford, 1956), 32-5. This translation from Clancy, *Triumph Tree*, 159-60.



Till the day of my death,  
before going in this clay,  
joyfully I will make  
Christ's cross across my face.

Similarly, a little image on a cross-slab at Meigle (no. 2) shows one man kneeling on the shaft of the cross, pulling up to the safety of the cross a man whose feet are being rescued from the jaws of a monster.<sup>81</sup>

The back of this same slab shows Daniel, being licked by lions. Eamonn Ó Carragáin has explored deeply the imagery of such scenes, which create types of Christ not just by the well-known parallelism of exegetical figures, but also by the imagery of revealing Christ between two beasts, an image which draws on a passage from Jerome's translation of Habakkuk, part of the seventh- and eighth-century liturgy, and one which was discussed intensively by exegetical writers of the period, such as Bede.<sup>82</sup> It is an image we find also on the Ruthwell Cross, where Christ in the desert is recognised by two beasts: Ó Carragáin has shown how this was also a eucharistic image. Here it is linked closely with another image of Christ revealed in the desert, that of the sending of bread to Paul and Anthony, who break bread between them, thus fulfilling the words "they recognised him in the breaking of bread". He has further explored this theme as it appears on other Scottish sculpture, such as the cross slab at Nigg; we may

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<sup>81</sup> See illustration in RCAHMS, *South-East Perth: An Archaeological Landscape* (HMSO, 1994), 99, also 90.

<sup>82</sup> E. Ó Carragáin, "Christ over the beasts and the Agnus Dei: two multivalent panels on the Ruthwell and Bewcastle Crosses", in Szarmach and Oggins, *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Culture*, 37-403; see also J. O'Reilly, "The Book of Kells, folio 114r: a mystery revealed yet concealed", in Spearman and Higgitt, *Age of Migrating Ideas*, 106-14. On Daniel, see S. Alexander, "Daniel themes on Irish high crosses", in Farrell, *Insular Tradition*, 99-114.

point further to St Vigeans 7, with its emblematically petrine-tonsured monks.<sup>83</sup>

What this seems to reveal is that churchmen in Scotland during this period were thinking about, and had developed a deep devotion to, the Eucharist. It also testifies to the fact that their beliefs concerning it were the mainstream ones of early medieval Europe: the persistent linking of the Eucharist to the passion, and the implicit message that in the Eucharist the real body of Christ which suffered and died for the sins of the world is revealed, makes this certain. From the eighth century, within the context of the *céli Dé* reform movement, subsequently a pervasive force in Scotland,<sup>84</sup> we have one of the best statements of the meaning that the Eucharist had for contemporary Gaelic Christians, in a tract on the mass in the Irish Stowe Missal.<sup>85</sup> It would not be wise to transfer this, somewhat idiosyncratic text wholesale onto the liturgical practices and the theology of Scotland at the time; nonetheless we may note its theology as of interest, at least. Of particular note is the way in which its allegorical interpretation of the mass as figuring the story of salvation (e.g., “The Altar is the figure of the persecution which is inflicted”, “The elevation of the chalice ... is a commemoration of Christ’s birth”) is halted briefly for positive statements that invoke no figures or commemorations, concerning the host: “The host on the paten: Christ’s flesh on the tree of the Cross”; “the fraction on the paten: the breaking of Christ’s Body with nails on the Cross”.

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<sup>83</sup> Ó Carragáin, “The meeting of Saint Paul and Saint Anthony: visual and literary uses of a eucharistic motif”, in *Keimelia: Studies in Medieval Archaeology and History in Memory of Tom Delaney*, ed. G. Mac Niocaill and P.F. Wallace (Galway, 1988), 1-58, plus plates.

<sup>84</sup> On which see Clancy, “Iona, Scotland and the *céli Dé*”.

<sup>85</sup> G.F. Warner, *The Stowe Missal* (Henry Bradshaw Society, 1906, 1915; repr. Woodbridge, 1989), at 37-42; a clearer edition of the Old Irish tract on the mass is W. Stokes and J. Strachan, *Thesaurus Palaeo-Hibernicus*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1903), ii, 252-5. There is also an extended version of this tract, little consulted or discussed, in the fourteenth-century *Lebor Breac*. For an edition and translation, see D. MacGregor, “An ancient Gaelic treatise on the symbolism of the Eucharist, with translation and notes”, *Transactions of the Aberdeen Ecclesiological Society*, 3.2 (1894-6), 293-340.

Most strikingly, a miracle first recorded in a Scottish text, this time from Northumbrian Whithorn, entered contemporary theological debates over the nature of the Eucharist in ninth-century Carolingian Francia. In the Latin poem, *Miracula Nynie Episcopi*, “The Miracles of Bishop Nynia”,<sup>86</sup> written in Whithorn in the eighth century, a copy of which was certainly transmitted to Alcuin in Francia soon after, the general telling of the life of Bishop Nynia is concluded with a series of miracles which occurred at the shrine of Nynia in Whithorn. One of the most striking involves a priest, Plecgils, who prays to have Christ revealed to him in the body as he celebrates the Eucharist.<sup>87</sup> He is rewarded with a visual and tactile experience of Christ as a baby on the altar in place of the bread. The priest kisses his lips and head, holds him in his arms, then the body is returned in his sight to the form of the host, which he diligently eats, and then “belches forth praise”. This almost crude image emphasises, as does his dandling of the infant Christ, the bodiliness of Christ as revealed in the Eucharist. The miracle was later used by Paschasius Radbertus in his lengthy dispute with his colleague in the monastery of Corbie, Ratramnus, on the real presence in the Eucharist.<sup>88</sup> Interestingly, in the late eleventh-century when the debate on the real presence was stirred again in Europe by the controversies of Berengar,<sup>89</sup> our Whithorn miracle re-surfaces in Ireland, through the intermediary of Radbertus, in an Irish poem declaring the orthodox position on the real presence, and instructing priests to commit it to memory that they may instruct their congregations properly.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> For text and translations, see note 28 above; see also W. Levison, “An eighth-century poem on St. Ninian”, *Antiquity*, 14 (1940), 280-91.

<sup>87</sup> §13.

<sup>88</sup> Levison, “Eighth-century poem”, 285-6, suggested that he received it through Adalhard, the abbot of Radbertus’s monastery of Corbie during Alcuin’s time, and a friend of Alcuin. Radbertus knew the whole poem and not just the miracle. On the controversy, see Pelikan, *Growth of Medieval Theology*, 74-80. It is not impossible that the author of the Stowe Missal tract knew Radbertus’s treatise, and supports it in the formulations mentioned above.

<sup>89</sup> On which see Pelikan, *Growth of Medieval Theology*, 184-204.

<sup>90</sup> G. Murphy, “Eleventh or twelfth century Irish doctrine concerning the real presence”, in *Medieval Studies presented to Aubrey Gwynn, S.J.*, edd. J.A. Watt, J.B. Morrall and F.X. Martin (Dublin, 1961), 19-28.

We have seen how the images on one side of the Ruthwell Cross are eucharistic and monastic: images of Christ revealed in the desert, between two beasts and in the breaking of bread. A third image is of Christ the child fleeing to/from Egypt in the arms of his mother. This final image, that of the incarnation, and particularly of Mary as *Theotokos*, “God-bearer”, is one repeated to stirring effect on sculpture and in manuscript throughout the world of Scotland and its near neighbours, and suggests a strong devotion to the Christ Child as incarnation, and to Mary the Mother of God.<sup>91</sup> Two images from the high crosses on Iona, roughly contemporary with both the Miracle of Nynia and the Ruthwell cross, serve to confirm this.<sup>92</sup> These images of Virgin and Child are strikingly central to these crosses: Christ is thus revealed both in the incarnation and in the passion, and the two are intimately connected here.<sup>93</sup> But further, the specific design of these scenes, repeated also on the Kildalton Cross on Islay,<sup>94</sup> suggests still deeper meanings: Mary is presented as the Ark of the Covenant, “God-bearer” in several ways. The two cherubim who stretch their wings over her head recall the descriptions of the ark in Exodus 25.10-22 and elsewhere, where two cherubim likewise stretch their wings to touch in an arch over the ark of the covenant. This is found also in the putatively Scottish (e.g., perhaps from Iona) image of the Virgin and Child from the Book of Kells. As Gilbert Márkus has observed, this image also forms a diptych with another page, in having ranks of witnesses observing the incarnation, and the crucifixion (a crucifixion image was probably originally opposite the words “Tunc crucifixeabant”).<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> On Mary as *Theotokos*, see Pelikan, *Growth of Medieval Theology*, 68-74.

<sup>92</sup> Fisher, *Early Medieval Sculpture*, 46, 50.

<sup>93</sup> For the importance of such a connection in terms of contemporary theological controversy, see *ibid.*, and pp. 74-80. Indeed, a reading of the controversies of the day might suggest that the centrality of the image of the Virgin and Child on the Iona crosses makes a statement about all three issues raised here: that Christ who suffered on the Cross was the same as he who was born of Mary, and that his body was that which was present in the Eucharist. Not enough attention has been paid to the programmes of the Iona crosses.

<sup>94</sup> Fisher, *Early Medieval Sculpture*, 49.

<sup>95</sup> Most conveniently in Clancy and Márkus, *Iona*, note on the cover on p. i.



The imagery of Mary as *Theotokos* and as intimately caught up in the matter of salvation is one which was also explored in the poetry of the Iona monk Cú Chuimne, who died in 725.<sup>96</sup>

Mary of the Tribe of Judah,  
Mother of the Most High Lord,  
fitting care she gave  
to languishing mankind.

Gabriel first brought the Word  
from the Father's bosom  
which was conceived and received  
in the Mother's womb....

By a woman and a tree  
the world first perished;  
by the power of a woman  
it has returned to salvation.

The cult of the Virgin Mary was thus fairly clearly part of the Columban world.<sup>97</sup> Blathmac mac Con Brettan's poem, too, bears witness to this, in his intimate vision of the mother of God coming to assist him in keening for Christ. So too, it would appear that Marian theology was at least partially responsible for the theology behind Adomnán's Law of the Innocents.<sup>98</sup> Adomnán also recounted two tales of the miraculous powers of an icon of the Virgin in Constantinople.<sup>99</sup> It may be just such an image which lies

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<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 177-92.

<sup>97</sup> See also J. Hawkes, "Columban virgins: iconic images of the Virgin and Child in insular sculpture" in *Studies in the Cult of St Columba*, ed. C. Bourke (Dublin, 1997), 107-35.

<sup>98</sup> M. Ní Dhonnchadha, "Birr and the Law of the Innocents", in *Adomnán at Birr, A.D. 697: Essays in Commemoration of the Law of the Innocents*, ed. T. O'Loughlin (Dublin, 2001), 20-7.

<sup>99</sup> *De Locis Sanctis*, iii.5.

behind the sort of Marian imagery found in places as diverse as St Cuthbert's coffin; the Book of Kells; and the Virgin and Child plaque at Brechin.<sup>100</sup>

I would like to emphasise that none of these ideas: the nature of the atonement; the real presence in the eucharist; the role of Mary in the scheme of salvation, were uncontroversial issues in the early middle ages. On the contrary, they were issues which were hotly debated in Carolingian Francia, although they ultimately became touchstones of later medieval catholic belief as the theology behind them was gradually honed. To me, it is singularly important that we find the imagery associated with such recognisably "catholic" issues, and such deep and important ones, present in both the poetry and the art of early medieval Scotland. Such imagery thus not only connects the different churches of early medieval Scotland to each other, they connect those churches to the wider European world of belief and theological debate.

I hope that people will not get the idea that I am saying that early medieval Scotland was "Roman Catholic". I am not trying to substitute yet another line of tendentious apologetic for the older one. There was much, on an institutional level, and no doubt also on a theological level, which may well have been aberrant from the general European norm, to the extent that there was such a norm in the early middle ages. Certainly, though there was contact with Rome, there is little sign of any constant concern for Rome's opinion, approval, and protection in Scotland during the period in question, something which is certainly present elsewhere in contemporary Europe (though not everywhere, and not at all times), and this would later be a vivid aspect of medieval Scotland. Though there were bishops in early medieval Scotland, we understand little about their jurisdiction or their functions. Though universal saints like Mary were culted, so too were a vast variety of extremely local ones, and perhaps some saintly phantoms or ex-gods. For all the orthodoxy of images of crucifixion and incarnation on sculpture of the period, in Pictland and Alba at least they jostle also with

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<sup>100</sup> Hawkes, "Columban virgins"; G. Henderson, *From Durrow to Kells: The Insular Gospel Books, 650-800* (London, 1987), 154-5; D. Kelly, "The Virgin and Child in Irish sculpture", in Bourke, *From the Isles of the North*, 197-204; and R. Trench-Jellicoe, "A missing figure...", *PSAS*, 129 (1999), 597-648.

much less conventional, indeed, often secular images of battle, hunting, or of fabulous animals like centaurs, to say nothing of the enigmatic Pictish symbols. What I think is demonstrable, however, were we to cast our eyes carefully around Europe, is the extent to which such local features, such variations on a theme, are part and parcel of what it was to be Christian in early medieval Europe.<sup>101</sup>

Thus, to conclude, I think it is important that we allow the early medieval church in Scotland to be itself. It shared contacts, imagery, concerns and orientation among the different regional churches within it, and with the outside world, in Europe as in Ireland. Nor was it static – we can easily see change and development, often displaying exposure to wider European trends. Most importantly, it is not capable of explanation by one single term, be that “Celtic” or “catholic”. Though we cannot piece together a clear narrative of the institutional development of the church in Scotland during this period, we owe it more than we have given it so far. There is evidence there to construct some vision of the devotion and development of belief in Scotland: it lies not just in “historical” documents, but in literature and art. Only by properly exploring these resources, freed from the shackles of outmoded historiographical models, will the true nature of the early medieval church in Scotland be revealed.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> I am conscious that, by another route, I am restating Ian Cowan’s coda from 1974 in this journal: “The idea of a separatist Celtic church cannot be maintained and with the removal of this barrier the fuller integration of the Scottish Church into the framework of the Church Universal can be seen not as a violent break with the past but the natural consummation of an extended evolutionary process”, Cowan, “Post-Columban Church”, 260. I am equally conscious that this needs restating.

<sup>102</sup> This paper grew out of one originally given to the Scottish Catholic Historical Association’s 1999 conference “Writing Scottish Catholic History”, and I am grateful to the audience at that conference, and to the members of the SCHS to whom I gave a revised version in May 2002, for comments and encouragement. Debts to several colleagues will be obvious in the text: my thinking here has been especially influenced by discussions with Gilbert Márkus, Sally Foster, Katherine Forsyth, Alex Woolf and Donald Mcek, though they hold no responsibility for my words.

